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November 29, 1967

Dr. Harold Brown
Secretary of the Air Force
Department of the Air Force
The Pentagon
Washington, D. C. 20301

Dear Harold:

I am writing you so that this letter will get directed to the most appropriate place for its consideration. In doing so, I hope that I am not abusing our acquaintance.

The purpose of this letter is to present an idea designed to ameliorate some of the problems of dissension. It involves reconsideration of the trade-off for national security between classification and more complete disclosure of the information and strategic planning that underlay our foreign policy choices.

As a "conscientious dissenter" (the quotations refer to the President's news conference of Friday, November 17), I am concerned with the increasingly irrational nature of both the dissension that is taking place and the public response to that dissension. This is a danger to the nation. It frustrates the ability to solve problems of national and international importance. While I persist in dissenting, I also yearn to be convinced of my error. This dilemma is shared by many in the academic community and, I believe, by many others throughout the country.

It has been stated many times that our aims in Vietnam are "to protect the security of the United States and ... the security of the United States is definitely tied to the security of Southeast Asia." Is this statement a sufficient response to the demand for a rational critique of our policies? With the stakes as high as they already are, I think not. I wish to know the supporting facts and logic. Using publicly available information, I and many others, have come to the contrary conclusion concerning the relationship of national security and our policy. While much of the noise of debate centers around detailed tactical questions, such as stopping the bombing, or utilizing the United Nations, the substantive question is the validity of our aims as stated by the President.

I recognize that considerable effort and analysis on the part of the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and many others, with relevant skills, upon whom the President relies for advice, form the basis for the decisions that he must make. I also realize that, in the interests of national security, much of this information is classified. I am suggesting a review of the need for the classification of the facts and strategic planning that are the logical foundation of our national policy. The security loss due to partial or full declassification

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needs to be weighed against the gain that would result from the unity and support of national purpose and goals that would be achieved if intelligent dissenters were convinced by a confrontation with this evidence and came to share the President's convictions about our national aims. On the other hand, if this were not the case, the arguments of rational dissenters would be based on better information, would be focused on more specific differences, and hence should prove to be more useful.

What I am pleading for is the publication of a "white paper", giving as full a disclosure as possible of the detailed facts and reasoning which support the assertion that our actions in Vietnam are necessary to protect the security of the United States. To serve its purpose it would have to be sophisticated and avoid the pejorative label of a public relations effort. I, for one, would like the opportunity to carefully consider such a document with the purpose of re-examining my own posture. If our policy is rational, this fact ought to be demonstrable. While the audience that would read the arguments carefully and with an open mind might be small, their influence would be significant and multiplicative.

Perhaps it can be argued that only a full disclosure would be effective, that the price in security loss for this is too high, and that anything less complete would only add to dissension and confusion, giving losses on both scores. In any case I think the question is worthy of consideration.

Regards,

Elliott C. Levinthal

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